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THE VERMONT FARMER

Four-thirty in the morning and no matter 'what the season nor the weather, all over Vermont, barn doors begin to creak and milk palls to clatter, as some 40,000 farmers start their day's chores. in low river farms sprawled out on the banks of the great Connecticut, in rich upland farms whose rolling fields clothe the nether hills and in high out-back farms where timid clearings cling among the out-cropping of shale and granite, life begins at four-thirty the year around. In winter the farmer, this servant of the productive cow, walks beside his shadow dancing from a dangling lantern or thrown by the high-arched goose-neck over shed and barn door. In summer he rises to the clarion call of cock flung challengingly from the barnyard fence. To the glory of the rising sun and to the accompaniment of the heart-swelling choir of wakening feathered life, he takes his morning course.

In the early dews and damps of morning, in the late afternoon snow or heat these chores must be done, come what may. The farmer is tied to his farm day in and day out, year in and year out. The seasons bring their minor changes, but even these, with the repetition of year stacked upon year, become an old story.

According to the New England Crop Reporting Board, there were on hand January 1, 1939 an estimated number of 305,000 cows and heifers over two years old, and 448,000, all cattle and calves. These animals were estimated to be 2 worth $234,333,000. The 1935 Census gives the number of farms for Vermont as 27,000 (the number which are

commercial dairy farms are not separated but presumably there are somewhat around 22,000 commercial dairy farms in the state). The value of product in 1935 is estimated at $26,210,000 for milk, and $2,8OO,OOO for sale of cattle and calves. ([?]. N. Loveland, Intension Dairyman, U. V. M., Burlington, Vt., states in letter of April 17, 1939, that later figures are not available. [No?] also reports that Dr. Varney estimates that the average dairy farm has approximately one and one-half men per farm. I quote the last paragraph directly from his letter)

Nathaniel Abbott Tucker rolled over and peered at the gray square of window. Some sixth sense developed through years of rising at dawn told him that it was the beginning of another day though the low heavy morning clouds made it seem much earlier than four-thirty. He glanced at [Hepsy?]. Humph, still sleepin' the sleep o' the just. He reached over and laid a heavy hand gently on her shoulder.

“Hey, Hepsy, it's four-thirty. Time t' git up...”

Hepsy murmured and stretched. While she was waking, Nate slipped his pants on over his nightshirt and padded to the kitchen in his stocking feet. He banged on the stovepipe for the hired man to wake and then tackled the kitchen stove. There was left from the night before a good bed of live coals, so he raked, poked and clattered, until they lay as thin and even as he liked. A few twists 3 of paper, some fine stuff and pine cones, then a stick of dry birch with the bark on and the fire roared merrily up the chimney. In the winter months Nate tended to the settin' room stove, too, but 'twant cold enough now to need a fire in there all the time, so he let Hepsy tend to it should she want one durin' the day.

While the fire was getting under way Nate put on his clothes which had hung over the back of a chair in the warm kitchen all night. Nate was always the last one to go to bed and in real cold weather they used the settin' room or the kitchen as dressing rooms. The bedroom was an unheated ice-box in winter. Hepsy came, walking carefully on feet not yet limbered from their early morning stiffness - she suffered from fallen arches - and it

made it hard to get going. She was fully dressed in a starched gingham dress covered by a belt-gathered apron whose small bib was a postage stamp on the vast expanse of her bosom. She stepped into the bathroom to wash her face and comb her wavy grey hair. Nate always made his morning ablutions at the kitchen sink from force of habit set during the years when they had no bathroom. He soused his head and splashed water over his neck and arms. After a good lathering and rinse he come up blowing and puffing like a grampus and dived into the great roller towel that hug on the back of the door. Hepsy always said Nate sounded like a walrus “takin' a mornin' ablution.”

Nate shoved his long legs into rubber boots and struggled 4 into his frock which had hung on a hook behind the door. He collected the clean and shining milk pails from the “buttry” and started for the barn. Ben came down the back stairway from the kitchen-chamber in time to repeat the process at the kitchen sink and follow Nate out the door.

Hepsy began to step the stiffness out of her feet. She wouldn't any more than have time to get the hearty breakfast onto the table before the menfolks would be up from the barn. She set the big double-boiler of oatmeal, which had been cooking all night, on the back of the stove, down front to git het-up, cut up cold boiled potatoes in a skillet with a little bacon fat melted in the bottom. She fried up some bacon and half a dozen eggs, set the coffee pot to goin' and got out a plate of doughnuts to balance the thick slices of home-made bread. Hepsy stepped light for all her heft and lame feet and the only sound over the whisper of her shoes in the pleasant warm kitchen was the boiling kettle and the sizzling fry-pan. She liked this first half-dark of day breaking and worked from long habit without the lights so she could keep an eye on the coming of the morning. The thrifty geraniums at the windows flanked by coleus and gay begonia took on color as well as shape in the growing brightness.

Nate and Ben had stepped cut into the early morning air, so clear-clean feeling that there was something heady about it. The low-lying clouds were breaking against the eastern horizon and soon the sun would melt them away. The 5 men from long practice read

accurately the signs of the coming day. It was nippy, a late day in spring, but not frosty. Smoke from the village chimneys rose wavering in the air and the left-over stillness of the deep reaches of the night were shattered by the many waking sounds that come with the dawn.

Pails dangling, they made their way to the milk house, a small building about ten by twelve, which clung like an after-thought to the side of the big red barn. Inside it was scrupulously neat, every window and door screened against flies. The cement floor was center-drained and flushed clean after each milking. In the depths of the electric cooler were several cans of milk from the last night's milking. On wooden pegs hung the paraphernalia of the milking machine.

Through the years Nate had allowed himself and Hepsy a few of the more indispensable improvements which make farm work so much less of a chore. He had been be-deviled by the usual run of salesmen trying to sell “on time” machinery of all types. Nate always held off. His creed through the years was, “I don't buy what I can't plank the money down for right on the line.” Consequently his credit was good. When several years back, it had seemed a possibility that Edward might have become interested in the place, Nate had allowed Hepsy to persuade him to install the bathroom and electric lights. Increased supervison of milk production had made the electric cooler a necessity as well as a good investment. Years past getting up ice from the pond had 6 been one of the hardest of the winter chores.

Nate owned his farm free and clear. One of his consoling thoughts when things seemed hard was, “They say ninety percent of Vermont farms is mortgaged. Wal, I can be thankful mine ain't one of 'em.” If there hadn't been so much in taxes and such scalpin' prices on the milk Nate would have been well off. His father always planned to have money in the bank laid away for the proverbial rainy day. Nate considers he is fortunate if he can break even and he'll have to leave the future to the Almighty if the [govment?] won't step in and do something for 'em when they get by-the-prime. He would like to sell. One of his favorite

dreams is a little house built up in the pine woods on the bluff where he and Hepsy can live out their days. The big place is bleeding them gradually and unless a miracle happens they will never be free of it.

Ben got at the cleaning up while Nate rolled in the milk cans and with wooden clothspins fastened the strainer cloths over their gaping mouths. Soon the steady pulsation of the milker, like the faint beat of a far off tom-tom gathered the mooing, munching, swishing sounds into a symphony of ritual. The men worked without comment or remark. Each knew his part and each did it with the promise of breakfast gnawing at his innards and hurrying his hands and feet. The cows changed from restless anxious creatures to the heights of bovine contentment. Cleaned, watered, stomachs full and heavy udders emptied, they contemplated 7 the narrow gap in their horizon with wide, placid, vacant eyes. Natural desires fulfilled, they neither asked nor expected anything more.

Nate has carried on this farm all his life. He has lived in the big white house, boy and man, for nigh onto seventy-four years. Still hale and hearty though somewhat bent and weathered by the ups and downs of his years of toil, he carries on patiently. His philosphy of life he will tell simply. “Do the best ye can, take what comes an' leave the rest to the Almighty.”

Nate's “schoolin'" was in the little red school house up by the fork in the roads. There some fifteen or twenty of the village boys and girls learned readin', writin', and 'rithmetic and learned them thorough, mind you, and there they cut up all the capers in the category. They slid down the long-hill, skated on the frozen brook, chased rabbits in the woods, picked mayflowers and brought them in hot, moist bunches to the teacher and teased the timid souls of their number. They played “snap the whip,” “I spy,” and the older began to ape the grown-up young folks and played sly games of “Copenhagen” and “Needle's Eye.” They whispered, passed notes, pulled the long braids so temptingly swung over a coquettish shoulder and munched many a doubly sweet-flavored apple behind a sheltering book. Then, in later years, a gawkey youth with broad shoulders and hands and feet too

big for his convenience, Nate attended the Town Central School for the usual number of terms.

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When Nate graduated there were three generations of adults living in the big white house. Ma and Pa were in their prime then, Grandsir and Grandma'am were gettin' on a bit and Aunt Hitty, Pa's oldest sister, was livin' in to help Ma about the work. Since Nate was the only boy the farm fell straight to him. His sister, Lucretia, went to Training School, taught school up river for several years and then married a nice fellow from down Blood Brook way. Now she had a grown family of her own and came back to the old place almost as infrequently as the young-fry did.

Nate's consuming ambition at the time he was graduated was to become a surgeon. “A Doctor,” he says, with the faint awe of never satisfied desire lingering in his voice. He contemplates his hands and ruefully shakes his head. Gnarled, rough, weather-worn with tough skin and knotted knuckles, “Don't look like they'd ever make a doctor's hands, would they?” He sighs a wafted breath for lost dreams, “But that was a good many years ago.”

“They wa'nt anything else to do,” he continues. “No money extra and all them old people to be taken care of. So I told Pa I'd stay. An'....here I been, ever since. It's been....a livin'.”

In his early twenties he met Hepsibah Lovewell from down below and he smiles reminiscently, weather wrinkles breaking out at the corners of his eyes. “I knew she were my mate the fust time I set eyes on her. I got her, too, by gum.”

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Soon after there were four generations in the big white house. During those years it didn't seem so big for it overflowed with all the young and old within its walls. “Then,” says Nate with a tempered sadness, “the folks began to go. Grandsir signed his half the farm to me and Father and I was in company together for nigh on twelve years. Grandma'am died a while before and Grandsir went soon after. Then quite a while later Father died and

Mother, than Hepsey's Father and Mother, then her brother, then Aunt Hitty. After that the children grew up and none of them was interested in this great old farm. I got four grandchildren but they're all way beyent down country. So here we be...left alone. I don't know why 'tis...but, here we be....”

After a hearty breakfast washed down and settled by several cups of coffee strained audibly through his grey moustache, Nate and Hepsy settle in their rockers before the plant screamed windows with their Bibles. Ben, who thinks this mornin' Bible readin' is all foolishness, retires to the shed steps for his after-breakfast pipe. Nate does not smoke and while Ben knows they won't mind his pipe he feels a leetle more comfortable “t'th' other side o' th' door” with it. For some years while the children were reaching out and gathering in the ways of the outside world, Nate and Hepsy were apologetic but persistent about this morning ritual. Edward, Margaret and Mary were never openly disdainful but as soon as they reached the independent stage they quietly forgot to be present. Nate laid down a few ultimata 10 on the subject but the pressure of three in revolt and Hepsy's non-interference policy were too much for him. He and Hepsy console themselves that sometime “The children will come to it.” Alone they find comfort in this small act of daily communion. The Bibles are worn from constant use and many are the passages that these two can repeat word for word.

After their morning devotions are completed Nate and Hepsy turn willing steps toward whatever the day may hold for them. Hepsy's morning will be a round of cleaning, dusting, bedmaking and cooking. She declares, sometimes with a sigh, that the days are full of food, she no more'n gets the breakfast cleared than it's time to think of dinner and that's all there is to it every day.

Nate turns his foot toward the barn again. In the winter when it's not too cold he spends most of every morning in the barn work-shop where he fashions a new tongue for a wagon or mends harnesses. There he does the many little odd jobs which are necessary in preparation for the busy season which will come with the breaking up of the spring roads.

The busy seasons which will make his summer a time of early to bed and early to rise with hours of hard work sucked swiftly between. The biggest chores of winter are gettin' out lumber and gettin' up wood.

Nate owns a tract of land, timber-covered, way up on the side of Wartt Mountain. It is called the Promised Land because his grandsir promised it to his father when the latter 11 was a young man. Then, in the press of events it was never deeded over and eventually came to Nate in his grandfather's share. Nate's father, Josias Bates Tucker, always said “it made no matter for 'twas all in the family, anyhow.” From the Promised Land comes lumber for the many patchings and connivings which go into keeping an old place fit. Shingles for the roof are sawed out down at Hendry's Mill, timbers and boards are “got up” when needed, and fire-wood is chopped into four-foot lengths “drawed down off the mountain” and sawed up and split to stove wood for the house fires, the kitchen stove, the living room chunk stove, and the seldom used fireplace in the parlor.

In the late spring, after sugaring is a thing of the past, when the roads are honed down from the heaves and thaws of spring settling, when the days become longer and green begins to break along the brown branches, Nate and his horses spend happy days working over the rich brown soil of the farm lands; corn piece, potato piece, garden spot, oat piece, all to be plowed, harrowed or rolled according to their needs. These longer warmer days of preparing the seed for the harvest, when life pulses stronger and spring fulfills her promise, are like the resurrection to Nate. Seed time to harvest, harvest to seed time, long steps in the path of life.

Everything comes at once. Corn to plant, potatoes to get in, vegetable garden to plow. Nate has the long traces down from the front of the corn barn where they have made a 12 pretty red and yellow pattern against the weathered red paint all winter. The heavy grain has hung there on the cob, two traces of red, one on each side of the upper door, then three traces of yellow on each side of these, and at the end, a trace each of yellow and red mixed, following the line of the gable, then below, a solid row of yellow in a straight line.

Made a pretty sight there, out of reach of bird and rodent, where the passers-by could see it. Folks had commented on it, too. The corn was good as well as its arrangement. Long, solid heavy ears set closely and evenly with pure gold or ruby kernels, the whole firmly braided and tied into four foot traces.

Potatoes could go into the ground before corn, so one warmish day a while back, Nate had opened up the bulk-head and gone down into the dim ad dusty cellar. There by the bin he spent many an afternoon sprouting the “Tatties” which persist in acting as though they couldn't wait to get into the ground at first whiff of spring. Tatties can smell spring comin' along ways off, it seems. There in the cellar long sprouts lay like ghostly fingers. Some folks say the little tatties that grow from those sprouts are poisonous to eat. Over in the barrel against the stone foundation of the house are Nate's choice seed tatties. He goes over and lifts the burlap sacks which cover them. He takes one out and holds it cradled in the palm of his gnarled hand. It fits and becomes a part of that palm which helped make its being a reality. His fingers caress 13 the smooth skin unblemished by scar or scab. it feels faintly gritty and a powdering of fine loam floats down toward the floor. Nate knows you must never wash tatties before putting them away to the cellar for that would destroy their keeping properties, also you must never keep them in the light, for they will turn green, nor freeze them, or they will be sweet to taste after they are cooked.

The cellar is a huge place full of many divisions and dark mysterious corners. There are some apples left, carrots, beets and turnips in the earth cellar division. He goes through the furnace room. Nate can remember when they didn't have a furnace, when all the rooms was het by stoves. Still the stoves stand to supplement the furnace in coldest weather and for Hepsy to manage should the furnace fire go out. Now in the spring they do not use the furnace at all. It is so easy to slip back into the old ways now that the children are not at home to keep them up to snuff.

Nate steps through into Hepsy's preserve caller. This square room is bricked up against the intrusion of frost, clear to the ceiling. Against the walls stand long rows of shelves and

there, even this late in the season, stand rank upon rank of full jars. They are the result of Hepsy's summer's work, though some of them have stood there more than one season through. Hepsy's stuff didn't spoil. Once it was down it stayed there and kept until needed.

It gives a man a good safe feeling to have provisions 14 stocked up like that. Even if he doesn't have much ready cash to fling about, he doesn't need to worry as to where the next meal is coming from. Come to figure it all out, they could get along pretty well for food stuff for quite a while. Just him and Hepsy and Ben to feed. About all they bought from the store at the four-corners was flour, sugar, coffee and maybe a few extras once in a while, like oranges or dried fruits and a bit of tea.

Part of the year they bought butter, but when they separated and sold cream instead of whole milk, they made their own butter. Usually this happened during the season when they were raising pigs and calves. Then the young stuff got the skimmed milk. It made them grow better. Then, too, you could do a bit more with what you could get for cream than what you could get for milk with the price so low and all, to say nothin' of cartage. While back when the village creamery was going, it was only a step to deliver a day's milkin'. Now they carted it by truck clear into town to the creamery and there it was sent down to the city.

In June all activities except the inevitable chores and necessary eating and sleeping are suspended for the big event of haying. The steady hum of the mowing-machine rises from the meadow piece like the continued buzz of an angry bee. The even swaths fall in graceful ranks and lie in long straight rows forming a pattern threaded by the silver needle of the brook embroidering the maple bush.

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Sun-dried and fragrant the heavy grass is swallowed by the loader and disgorged in the huge barn mows. This is the stuff of which a farm is made.

While Hepsy tends the vegetable garden and cans, pickles, jells, spices, and salts-away its various products, replenishing those long shelves and huge crocks in the preserve cellar, the men march on with the summer's work. Haying is followed by corn cutting and the filling of the great round silo, thrashing comes and the empty oat bins once more overflow their golden store. A thousand and one are the things which must be done to keep animal in production and man in food and clothing. When winter again lays its white hand gently down and suspends the feverish activity, when the night holds day in dark lingering grasp, and the sun withdraws its warmth, then comes days of relaxation. In the long evenings hard by the fat stove Hepsy mends while Nate reads aloud from one of the farm journals and the local news sheet.

This morning Nate starts for the barn, Ben who has finished his pipe and reluctantly knocked it out on the casing of the shed door and stuffed it into his pocket all in one long motion, follows along in his wake. Abel Johnston is coming up the road behind a pair of bays, heavy horses drawing a load of feed up from the depot.

“Whoa-up thar,” Abel draws lightly on the reins and the bays waver in their harnesses and stop at the top of the hill breathing gustily from the extra pull up the last rise.

“Mawnin', Nate.” Abel shifts his cud and spats over the off wheel.

“Mawnin', Abel.” Nate fingers the ends of his moustache and clasps his hands loosely behind his back. Ben says in passing, “How be ya, Abel?” leaves the answer in the air and disappears in the black square where the barn door stands open.

“Fine weather,” says Abel.

“So 'tis. Partaties in?” Nate inquires.

“Yeaup. Git my corn in this week. Lem come to you?”

“Wal, he was in-by t'other night.”

Lem is Abel's oldest son. He has wanted to put his savings into a truck but Abel has been against it. So Abel suggested that Lem go to Nate and see what he thought about it.

“What'd you tell him?”

“Wanted to git a truck along last fall, didn't he?”

“Yeaup,” Abel spat again. “Discouraged him. Couldn't git a new truck then. Didn't have money 'nough. Take a second-handed truck, stave it all to glory, winter goin'. Thought he'd be better off at a dollar a day clear. Wouldn't have even a truck left come spring, what with payments and all.”

“Took your advice, didn't he?”

“Yeaup, did.”

“Wal, Abel.....better let him have his head.”

“Think so, Nate?”

“Better let him have his head.”

“Wal...I might. Much obleged, Nate.”

“Um-humph.” Nate lifts his hand in farewell.

Abel drives off, screwing around on the wagon seat to send a compassionate glance back at Nate's stooped figure. At any rate, he thinks, Lem cares enough for the farm to stay there and not go gallivantin' off to the city. Maybe Nate is right, maybe he better let the young cock-a-lorum have some say about things. Abel grins to himself as he thinks of a

sayin' he heard. [Erra?] Eastman was holdin' forth down to the store past Sattidy how 'twas so hard to make a go of things on a farm now and he had said as how in his father's time they used to send the smart boys out int' the world to make doctors, lawyers, ministers and what-all and the simple boy in the family could make a good livin' on the home place and take care of the old folks. Now it was jest t'other way round, the simple ones went out to make a livin' off the suckers and the smart ones stayed t'home and with all the education they could git they had to scratch to make a livin'. Wal, Lem wasn't so simple as they did come, an' he might be a good deal wuss-off.

Ben comes out of the barn leading the pair of white work horses. Nate might have had a tractor long since but he figured as how he didn't have enough level land to make tractor profitable. Now the farmers down on the river meadows had a different proposition. Then again, a tractor could not be run with products which he could raise and the 18 confounded snortin' machine gave nothing back to the farm but an unholy stench. Nate is conservative and while he has provided material for ridicule in the past when times were booming even for the farmer, he is one of the few now who can continue on his even way with a secure roof over his head and equipment enough to manage with through the seasons.

This morning the men are going to the potato piece where Ben will mark out and furrow with the team. Ben walks moderate miles through the heavy loam which has had all the crumples and lumps smoothed out by the exploring iron fingers or steel disks of the harrows. Back of him on the piece Nate patiently drops the cut seed potatoes which have been soaked in formaldehyde to prevent scab. The big lumpy brown sacks lie in little colonies on either side of the field. A pail full will just about take Nate across. he fills out several rows and then taking his hoe he covers them and tamps each hill with an expert motion. Later as the potato plants show with fat crinkled leaves, they will be hoed up until the field is corrugated with brown lumps each sprouting a green bouquet. Spraying-hoeing-hoeing-spraying punctuate the summer months until about August when the blossoms have gone by and the tubers have set. From that time on they will be allowed to ripen in peace and in the fall when the tops are brown and sprawl heavy over each hill, the tines of

the potato hook will bite deeply and the brown dirty-faced tatties will roll forth to lie in the sun to dry.

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Nate and Ben will sack them and take them to the earth cellar where in the winter afternoons Nate will sort and pick them over. So many sacks for seed, so many sacks to the minister's folks, so many sacks to sell, so many sacks for their own use and the rest, scrubs, nubbins and small stuff, piled up in a corner and used - cooked, for pigs and hens.

The bright morning sun dries out the top-soil so that the new lines drawn by the marker show dark scars over the piece. The blue sky shines softly over the hills and lazy spring cloudlets drift silently, tag ends whipped by some high unseen wind. A capricious small breeze born of the distant hill, ruffles the horses' manes and tails, scuffs up a cloud of sun-dried loam and races off to shake the new pale green leave which have come out behind the bright red tassels of the maples. Nate is not thinking of these things as he mechanically drops the potatoes into their summer camps. He is thinking of the afternoon to come. His good friend Hiram Goodrich lies in state down there in the parlor of his home place. This afternoon last rites will be held for him. Nate is thinking of a prophesy told long since by Elder Carleton Beckwith.

When Nate's father died Elder Beckwith was named executor of the estate. Nate went to him for advice and consultation and was greatly sustained by the old man's fine store of dry-given wisdom. Some of the more officious and curious of the villagers wished to find out just how well 20 off Nate was left so they asked Elder Beckwith how things stood. He looked them over out of his keen old eyes under the bushy eyebrows, gave a yank or two of his fringe of grey beard and said,

“Tell ye what, boys. Ye jest go straight to Nate an' he kin tell ye, better'n I kin how the old man left him. An', boys, jest recollect this, Nate'll be carryin' on long after all o' you be

underground. Ye maybe think he do be a mite daft, but Nate'll be able to tend to him an' his'n."

Inevitably Nate had heard the story and the Elder's faith in him bore fruit through the years. The prophecy had come true and one by one friends and neighbors had gone on down the last long road ahead of him. Now Hiram's turn had come and he was the last, except Nate, of the "old guard." Sometimes Nate thought, "How long, oh Lord, how long?" and then he chided himself and resigned his spirit to living its time out. He guessed he could stand it long as Hepsy was hard by. Anyway, 'twas only fools and quitters who challenged the will of the Almighty.

At noon Hepsy blew a tremendous blast on the old conch shell. The hills caught the sound and bounced it back waking little grumbling echoes which ran way off to fade in the distance. Ben and Nate finished out the row they were on and started up the horses which had been grazing at the edge of the piece since Ben had finished marking with them, and started for the barn. They put the horses up, unharnessing and rubbing them down. The critters drank deeply and 21 noisily at the barn water barrel and went to their stalls for the two quarts of oats which lay ready in their mangers. They would have to stand in the barn the rest of this day for Hepsy, Nate and Ben would foot-it down to 'tend the funeral. 'Twouldn't take more'n an hour or two to see Hiram to his last restin' place over in the old cemetery but it broke up the afternoon. 'Twould be time for chores before they got done visitin' and back up to the farm again.

Nate was sorry Hiram was gone but still he could find a solemn pleasure in the prospect of seeing so many folks that he hadn't seen for years, as would tend the funeral that afternoon. Quite likely there'd be city people there, relatives and friends and young folks who hadn't been back to their native village for a spell. "Funny," Nate thought, "how folks can't never find time to get back to visit while you're alive and can enjoy it. But you jest let somebody die and they'll all come flockin' to ease their consciences and pay their last respects. Most likely to keep folks from talkin' some, too."

The two men washed and sat down at the table.

“Lord, we thank Thee for this food. May it give us strength sufficient unto the needs of the day, for Jesus sake, Amen.”

They attacked the meat, potatoes, gravy; the vegetables, “succotash” (corn and shell beans canned together, then heated up in milk with a hunk of butter added), stewed tomatoes and little chunks of sweet pickle. The dessert, juicy dried-apple pie, made according to a recipe Hepsy 22 got from her grandmother, and treasured accordingly, and great chunks of golden cheese all washed down in cup after cup of tea.

They ate in silence except for an occasional remark about the farm work or the food. After dinner Hepsy stacked the dished in the sink and put the food away in the “buttry” and went up to change into her good dress. The funeral wasn't 'til two, but Hepsy would go down early to help Mis' Goodrich get things red-up. Probably there'd be dishes to do after the raft o' relatives that would eat there at noon. She tucked a stiffly starched apron into her bag and took a big apple pie down from the buttry shelf. Probably, too, Mis' Goodrich could use it. Some of the other neighbors would send in pots of baked beans, scalloped dishes or maybe cake to help out. Hepsy like to help out, might be her turn to need help sometime, but she didn't like to think about that. Take each day as it comes and then it'll likely bring you enough grief.

Hepsy went in the side door and left Nate and Ben to talk with the little group of men gathered on the side porch, Goodrich's hired man, the undertaker's assistant and a couple others. They discussed the weather, crops, the milk situation, in subdued voices. There were none of the wide gestures, the ribald burst of laughter which usually marked a meeting of kindred spirits. All was restrained in proper proportion to the solemnity of the occasion.

Hepsy went quickly through the kitchen with her pie.

She left it in the buttry, hung her coat over the broom handle behind the door and slipped her apron on. The family and relatives were still in the dining room. Mis' Goodrich came out when she heard Hepsy. The two women clung to each other for a moment, then Hepsy wiped her eyes and in an attempt to attain the everyday in an unusual situation started in on the dishes.

Mr. Bainbury, the undertaker, came to the door and summoned his assistant with a nod. They kept going in and out with chairs and boxes of flowers. Mis' Goodrich left the kitchen to Hepsy and the women-kin and tended to Mr. Bainbury. As the women finished reddin'-up, the folks began to come. Cars drove up in the yard and horses lined the barnyard fence with buggies at all angles. Nobody felt comfortable to use the front door, it didn't seem neighborly somehow, even at this special time. The kitchen filled with farmers, passed, combed and shined. The butcher was there, the storekeeper (the store at the four-corners was closed during the hour of the funeral), the selec'men came all together, the school teacher, and folks from the Center all took their places in the quiet rooms. You could smell the flowers clear out in the kitchen.

The undertaker's bald head shone above dark thatches and thin grey locks. Folks liked Mr. Bainbury to do their services for them. He invested even the simplest task with a quiet dignity and reverence which gave it that touch of mysticism and final peace which helped to bring a surcease 24 to the troubled hearts of the next-o'-kin. He never rushed around important like, as though he couldn't get through the thing quick enough. My shake, the smell of flowers was powerful, roses, carnations, snapdragons, lilies. Such a raft of 'em!

Parson Potter rose to his feet from his place near the front of the room. The nearest relatives were gathered in the seats of honor directly in front of him. To his right lay the flower banked casket. He cleared his throat and the faint murmur and rustling ceased. It was quiet with that heavy quiet that comes of many folks together trying to still their noisy living in the face of death. The little yellow canary in the cage twittered and hopped about

from perch to perch. His bright eyes roved restlessly about over the crowd, he didn't quite like so many folks around. It was not natural. When May Brigham and her Pa rose up to sing the tow old hymn that Miram had so loved in life, the canary became a vibrating ball of yellow and lent a torrent of liquid melody to the harmony of the two voices.

Nate had been asked to be bearer. Hiram had made all the arrangements for this, his last earthly journey, before he went, even to the choice of hymns and the bearers. It had all been settled proper and to his satisfaction and he had gone out quietly and securely in the knowledge that his life was completed to the last detail. That happens sometimes with very old people who have worked hard and “wore out instead of rusted out.” Nate took a strange comfort 25 in the thought that his own life-ending would be marked with just such a simple and satisfying ceremony.

The long line of cars crawled over the road between the fields and meadows, church and hall, through the village and up the rise to the “burying' ground” which covered the knoll behind the church. Some of the men footed-it over through the fields and a little group of bareheaded men and quiet women gathered by the flower covered mound for the short commitment service.

After the funeral the store at the four-corners opened and the folks began to come and go. Except for so many folks dressed up in their Sunday best, life took on its usual weekday face. The storekeeper hustled round, a bit white apron with red scrawls across the front, advertising somebody's peanut butter, covering his good clothes which he had not taken time to change. He had hurried right down and opened up the store to catch all the trade that might come with so many people in the village temporarily.

Hepsy comes down from the house and she and Nate go up the hill toward home. Ben catches up on them. They say little. Each is thinking thoughts provoked by the service. As they near home the daily round drops down over their minds and they take up life where they left off, glad to be back in the security of normal ways, in the shelter of accustomed

routine. They do not fear death. Too often they have seen the resurrection and the triumph of life. Death itself is not a stranger. The cycle is ever before them in its completeness 26 through the seasons. The fundamental elements of man's existence are always with them, Life and Birth and Death.

Nate collects his milking paraphernalia and starts for the barn with a pair of overalls on over his good clothes. Hepsy calls after him and makes him change, for she claims the barn smell can never be got out of clothes once it's in. Nate grumbles and changes talking all the time about the “pernickityness of the female of the species.” Ben has gone to the pasture after the cows with Scottie trailing his heels. At last Nate gets away from the barn still rambling like an incipient volcano. Hepsy knows he is blowing off steam and smiles a little rueful smile for what he has had to go through in the loss of his good friend.

Nate never seems to hurry but he is always busy. Experience has taught him that nature will take her time about things and it is like fighting winds to try to hurry the “old lady.” It's the everlasting-keeping-at-it that counts. Seems like some seasons rush him more than others do, but there is always something waiting, something to be done. When chores come in sight at the end of the day and Ben comes down the road behind the herd of placid beasts, Nate feels his years. They fill him with contentment born of duty well done and compliance with a higher will. He looks off across meadow and woodland to the open place where white stones mark the final goal of so many good men and bad, who have inhabited these parts since they were settled, in the first half of 27 the seventeen-hundreds. It means a great deal to Nate to know his last resting place will be beside the neighbors he had known so well. The dreams of his young manhood seem far away and unimportant now so near the close of his life.

Across the meadow Ben and the cows come down the lane and into the road. The animals amble along taking their own gait. Sometimes one stops a moment to nibble a mouthful of the tender grass beside the road. Scottie following Ben's directions keeps them well in hand and they finally file by Nate with tossing heads, swishing tails, their full udders

swinging heavily. The long cow stable, cement floored and whitewashed, is filled with a variety of odors. Scottie lies down on the feed floor where, with lolling tongue, he can keep an eye on things. The barn becomes filled with a warm animal smell spiced through with the dusty remnant of last summer's hay in the mows above.

Ben opens the silo doors and wheels out load after load of hearty-sour-tanged insilage. After dunking their noses into the drinking cups, the animals turn their head in his direction and with dripping, slobbering tongues reach for their dessert. The calves bawl for their supper and two old barn cats, followed by a retinue of half-grown kittens, keep adroitly out from underfoot. Old Mouser takes her stand by Nate as he strips after the milker and he quirts a small stream of milk into her mouth as she sits up and begs for it. Head tipped back and eyes closed in ecstasy, the old cat swallows and tangles on a grateful purr.

Finally the chores are done. The barn is clean and neat with the feed floor swept. The cows are, many of them, lying down chewing their cuds contentedly. The men gather up the milking machine and pails leaving them in the carriage floor while they roll the cans of milk to the cooler. The milking machine is carried up to the house where Hepsy will wash it out before she goes to bed. After the morning's milking it will be taken to the creamery by the truck that gathers Nate's milk and the driver will wash it there and scald its inmost parts with live steam.

Up at the house Nate takes off his shoes and spreads his feet at the chunk stove hearth. Today hasn't been such a hard one on account of takin' time off to go to the funeral. Most days though, Nate is all ready for bed the minute he comes up from the barn. Tonight he picks up the paper and glances through the local items. He always begins at the back and works forward.

“Humph, I see Clem Dodge's folks has a grandson.”

“Yes, I looked at the paper.” Hepsy is busy with the milker and in no mood to talk.

Nate subsides and is soon drowsing over the news sheet with his glasses slipping off his nose. Ben's pipe makes a red glow in the shed door. It's coming dusk and out over the sugar place the sky shows faint red below the evening dark where the stars are beginning to come out. Swallows swing in wide low flight from the barn disturbed by some unseen menace. Then they settle to the grateful darkness 29 and quiet hovers over this small world. Ben knocks his pipe out with the same reluctant gesture. He comes in and Nate rouses.

“Another day, gone,” says Nate.

“Yeaup, 'nother day. Guess I'm away t' my bed. G'night.”

“G'night, g'night, Ben.”

“Time t' shut up shop, Hepsy.”

“Yes, I'm all done, Nate.”